

In 2014, the president's son, Dino Bouterse, pled guilty for his collaboration with a known terrorist group while a senior official in Suriname's counterterrorism unit. In a U.S. government sting operation, the younger Bouterse had agreed to sell Suriname passports and weapons to undercover U.S. operatives posing as members of Hezbollah. He was arrested in Panama and extradited to the United States to face drug-trafficking and weapons as well as other charges. He faces between 15 years and life in prison.

Political Rights and Civil Liberties:

Political Rights: 33 / 40 [Key]

A. Electoral Process: 12 / 12

The 1987 constitution provides for a unicameral, 51-seat National Assembly, elected by proportional representation for five-year terms. The body elects the president to a five-year term with a two-thirds majority. If it is unable to do so, a United People's Assembly—consisting of lawmakers from the national, regional, and local levels—convenes to choose the president by a simple majority. A Council of State comprised of the president and representatives of major societal groupings—including labor unions, business, the military, and the legislature—has veto power over legislation deemed to violate the constitution.

In 2010 legislative elections, Desiré Bouterse's Mega Combination coalition—comprising the National Democratic Party (NDP) and a number of smaller parties—captured 23 seats, while the New Front for Democracy and Development (NF) took 14 seats. A-Combination took 7 seats, the People's Alliance won 6, and the Party for Democracy and Development in Unity gained 1 seat. Bouterse was elected president with 71 percent of the parliamentary vote, defeating NF candidate Chandrikapersad Santokhi.

By the end of 2013, Bouterse had dismissed 10 ministers from his cabinet since taking power. In 2014, six members of parliament and two ministers stepped down after conflicts with the president; this left a thin majority.

Suriname is gearing up for an election in 2015, which President Bouterse appears likely to win.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 13 / 16

Suriname's many political parties operate freely. They largely reflect the cleavages in the country's ethnically diverse society and often form coalitions in order to gain power. The major coalitions are the NF, an alliance of the National Party of Suriname and several smaller parties; the People's Alliance; the Mega Combination; and the A-Combination, which has strong support among Maroon communities (descendants of former slaves).

C. Functioning of Government: 8 / 12

The Ministry of Justice and Police is in charge of combating corruption, but the country has no anticorruption legislation. Corruption reportedly increased in 2014 over the previous year. It is blamed for a resulting increase in crime, drug trafficking, and human trafficking. Member of parliament Carl Breeveld has requested the government's explanation in a number of cases, including missing funds of up to SR\$87 million (US\$26 million). Breeveld also discussed the failure of the public prosecutor's office to properly investigate governmental corruption.

In 2013, counterterrorism senior official and the president's son Dino Bouterse was arrested in Panama and sent to the United States to face drug-trafficking charges and a weapons offense. He pleaded guilty a year later to a number of offenses, including aiding and abetting terrorist networks, drug trafficking, and trafficking in firearms. In 2012, he met with undercover U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency officials in Greece who were posing as Hezbollah operatives. He agreed to sell Suriname passports and fake identities as well as weapons, including surface-to-air missiles to attack the United States and the Netherlands, in exchange for US\$2 million as a down-payment. Bouterse insists that he hoped that Hezbollah would assist in maintaining Suriname's domestic and international security.

Civil Liberties: 44 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 15 / 16

The constitution provides for freedoms of expression and the press, and the government generally respects these rights in practice. However, defamation and libel remain criminal offenses; if convicted, citizens could spend up to seven years in prison. Suriname also has a crime of insult law (insulting the head of state) that carries a sentence of up to five years in prison and a loss of civil rights.

Freedom of religion is protected by law and the constitution and is generally respected. The authorities do not infringe on academic freedom.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 11 / 12

The constitution provides for freedoms of assembly and association, and the government respects these rights in practice. Workers can join independent trade unions, though civil servants have no legal right to strike. Collective bargaining is legal and conducted fairly widely. The labor movement is active in politics.

F. Rule of Law: 8 / 16

The legal system of Suriname is based on the Dutch Civil System. The judiciary is prone to political influence and suffers from a shortage of judges. While Suriname is a signatory to the 2001 agreement establishing the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ) as the final venue of appeal for member states of the Caribbean Community, it has yet to ratify the CCJ as its own final court of appeal; therefore, the final court of appeal remains the Privy Council in London, England. In 2013, the government attempted but failed to establish a constitutional court, which is still not in place.

Crime rates are high, including regular incidents of violent crime. Criminals carry and often use firearms. There are many cases of police abuse during arrests and use of deadly force against alleged criminals.

Temporary detention centers are overcrowded and conditions are poor.

Suriname continues to serve as a major trafficking point for cocaine. In an August 2014 drug bust, cocaine worth up to US\$2 million was seized at the largest of Suriname's international airports. The country also functions as a transit point for arms trafficking in exchange for drugs.

President Bouterse has evaded justice for his role in the 1982 abduction and murder of 15 political opponents—including labor union leaders, attorneys, military officers, journalists, academics, and other citizens—of his military regime, which he led from 1980 to 1987. While he accepted “political responsibility” for the murders in 2007, the National Assembly controversially extended the country's 1992 amnesty law in 2012, thus granting immunity to him and 24 other suspects. The Prosecutor's Office has decided to uphold the amnesty law's constitutionality unless it is reviewed by a constitutional court, which has not been formed.

Discrimination based on race or ethnicity is prohibited by law. The government does not recognize or offer any special protections to indigenous groups. Their collective land rights are not acknowledged, and these populations continue to face problems due to illegal logging and mining on their land.

Same-sex sexual relations are legal, but LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) individuals face some discrimination. Members of the LGBT community accuse the police of brutality and not investigating the cases that they report. Three policemen were suspended in September after allegedly beating two gay men.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 10 / 16

Constitutional guarantees of gender equality are not adequately enforced. Domestic violence remains a serious problem. While the law provides for women's equal access to education and employment, women do not receive the same wages as men for performing the same work. Women held 25 percent of the seats in parliament at the end of 2014.

Suriname serves as a source, destination, and transit country for the trafficking of men, women, and children for the purposes of forced labor and prostitution. Efforts to tackle the problem have failed to put in place minimum standards.

Scoring Key: X / Y (Z)

X = Score Received

Y = Best Possible Score

Z = Change from Previous Year

[Full Methodology](#)